



# FEMA

## *Elevation Saved Family Home from Hurricane Ike*

**Kemah, TX** - Paul Strizek's home on Galveston Bay is much more than just a house. For more than 50 years, his bayside cottage has been at the center of the most important of his family memories, and it was his mother's house. So it was worth it to Strizek to have the home elevated onto concrete columns in the 1990s. "It cost some money," he said, "but I didn't want to lose that house."

His investment paid off September 13, 2008 when Hurricane Ike stormed ashore over Galveston Island just 20 miles south of Strizek's house. The Category 2 hurricane carried winds up to 125 miles per hour (mph), driving storm surge up the bay. Wind and water assaulted its colorful tourist shops, blue-striped lighthouse water tower, lavish restaurants, festive boardwalk, and 3,200-foot roller coaster.

The storm surge took down Strizek's steps, a dock, and the lower level's breakaway walls. All were carried out to sea. But the house survived, in excellent shape. However, many of his neighbors' houses were shattered. Two homes away, the surge swept an unelevated bay house out to sea.

He thinks the surge reached 12 feet at his house. The piers hold the house up 14 feet. "If I hadn't raised that house, it would be gone," Strizek said. A concrete sea wall that Strizek built after Tropical Storm Frances in 1998 helped curb erosion and dissipate wave energy. In addition, the windows were boarded up before the storm.

Despite the risk of facing the wind and sea on Galveston Bay, his house matters to Strizek in part because of the pervasive charm of the area. The site of Strizek's home, with its sweeping blue-green vistas of the bay and prime access at the Clear Creek outlet, is irresistible.

Strizek knows that Hurricane Ike is not the first or the last storm to hit Kemah, whose name is derived from an Indian word that means "facing the wind" and is home to nearly 2,300 residents. The specific town was founded in 1898 for railroad expansion. Two years later, it was leveled by the 1900 Galveston hurricane, one of the worst disasters in U.S. history. The town was virtually destroyed again by Hurricane Carla in 1961.

Another reason for Strizek's attachment is the house itself. "This house was built around 1919, as far as we have been able to determine," he said. "The materials and workmanship are superb." The inside was finished with old-growth East Texas pine, a wood considered to be of exceptional building quality.

The house is also Strizek's link with his past and his mother, Jane Strizek.

"My mother bought this house in 1963 as our summer home. Then we moved here full time in 1966, and I went to high school here. It was a sleepy little town then, with a drawbridge where the highway bridge is now. The house was low, on the ground, an old bay house on short pilings maybe three feet into the ground. I could crawl under it. She named it 'The Ark.'

"Lots of the bay houses were like that then. And a lot of them washed away in Carla. I have a picture of mother's house from 1961, undermined and heavily damaged. But somehow it has survived, all these years, all these storms," Strizek said.



Galveston County,  
Texas



### Quick Facts

Sector:

**Private**

Cost:

**\$62,130.00 (Estimated)**

Primary Activity/Project:

**Flood Insurance**

Primary Funding:

**Homeowner**